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British crime fiction'
Sunday Telegraph

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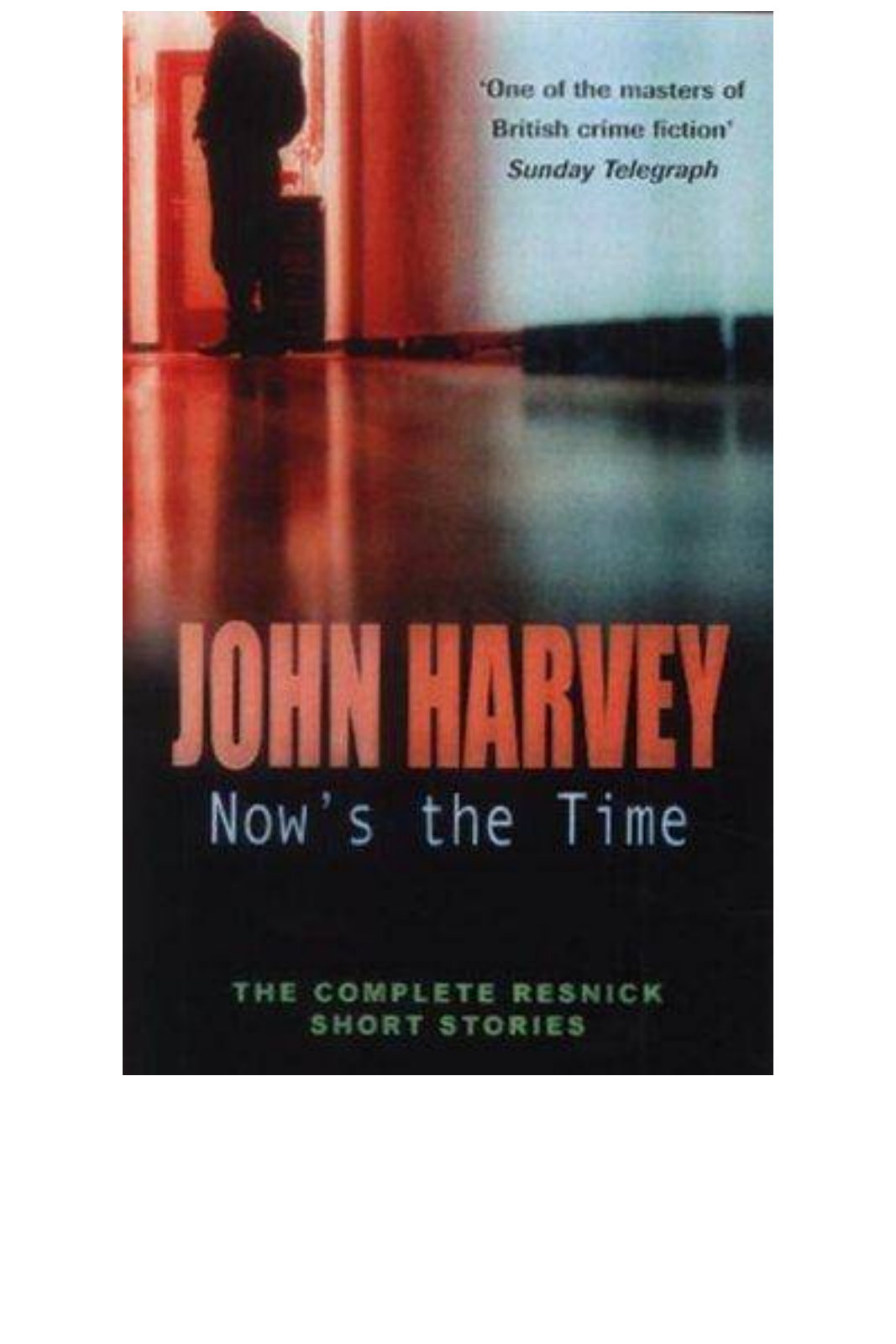
THE COMPLETE RESNICK
SHORT STORIES

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OFFICER: *Detective Inspector Charles Resnick*

FORCE: *Nottingham CID*

TIME: 1996

CASES: *'Lonely Hearts' (1989), 'Rough Treatment' (1990), 'Wasted years' (1993), 'Cold Light' (1994), 'Living Proof' (1995) etc.*

PROFILE: Charlie Resnick has been described as the misfit copper with a curious, passive charm. A man with a middle-aged paunch due to unhealthy food, bags under his eyes from too little sleep, he operates in the gritty and down-at-heel areas of Nottingham which are said to have among the highest number of cases of violent crime and murder per head in England: a fair proportion of which fall into Resnick's lap. Several of his cases have involved him crucially with women-a fact which frequently causes him to dwell on the state of his own lovelife. When not at work, Charlie fills in time on his own drinking and listening to jazz. With his Polish roots, quartet of cats named after jazz legends, and general feeling of disillusionment with police politics, Resnick is a multidimensional policeman who throws himself into an investigation as much to escape his loneliness as to solve the crime. In America, he has been greeted by reviewers as 'one of the most fully realised characters in modern crime fiction', while *The Times* recently said that he has now become established as the latest addition to 'that select band of cold but cultured English inspectors like Morse and Dalgliesh'.

CREATOR: John Harvey (b. 1948) started writing and editing while he was at school and later in college. For some years he worked as a teacher, at the same time continuing to write a whole batch of pseudonymous paperback novels. In 1976 he created his first private eye, Londoner Scott Mitchell, in *'Amphetamines and Pearls'*, and followed this with three more titles which, he says, were heavily influenced by the works of Raymond Chandler. It was in 1989 that he found his own voice with the first Resnick novel, *'Lonely Hearts'*, and added a new figure to the pantheon of memorable contemporary police detectives. John has also written scripts for television, including Central TV's series, *'Hard Cases'*, and was closely involved in the making of the BBC TV version of *'Resnick'*, starring Tom Wilkinson. The story *'Confirmation'* is a new case for the lonely DI that John wrote especially for this collection.

THE STORY:

Terry Cooke went to the pool every morning because it was good for his health. His doctor had told him so. Or, rather, his doctor had said, squinting above a pair of glasses held together with orange Elastoplast, 'Terry, you're going to have to change your lifestyle, that is if you're going to have any life at all. Future tense.'

A quarter past eleven on a sunny January morning, Terry was finally in Dr Max Bone's surgery after forty minutes shared with old copies of the *Guardian* magazine and the usual selection of bad backs, hacking coughs, and unmarried mums-to-be about to drop their firstborn on the worn carpet. The *Guardian*, for Christ's sake, where did Bone think this was, West Bridgford? And there was the doc ignoring his request for a referral to a chiropodist so Terry could get rid of his troublesome bunion on the NHS, and engaging him instead on issues of mortality. Life or death. His. Terry's.

'I'll stop smoking,' Terry said, prepared to be alarmed.

'You should.'

'Cut back on the drink.'

'Yes.'

'For pity's sake, I'm not even fifty.'

'You want to be?'

Terry got up from the chair and walked to the window. In the street outside, two kids in bomber jackets, neither of them above ten years old, and both wearing nearly-new Nike trainers that had come down the chimney with Santa, were dismantling a black and silver mountain bike whose owner had optimistically left it chained to a parking meter.

'Exercise,' the doctor said.

Terry couldn't see himself in one of those poncey jogging suits, sidestepping the dog shit round the edges of Victoria Park.

'Specifically, swimming; that's the thing.'

The only time in the last fifteen years Terry had been swimming, Carrington Lido had still been an open-air pool and not a bunch of cramped chi-chi houses with satellite dishes the size of dinner plates and shiny gold numbers on the doors.

'It's not just the aerobic activity,' Bone said, 'though you need that without question. It's the effect of the water. Calming.' He removed his glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose. 'It's the stress, Terry, it's making too great demands upon the heart.'

His back to the window, Terry could feel it, angry and irregular against his ribs. Cautiously, he returned to the chair and sat down. 'Swimming,' he said, uncertainly. 'That'd really make a difference?'

Bone nodded. 'If not, I know a wonderful masseuse. Shiatsu. Unfortunately not on the National Health.'

Terry thought he would try the swimming first. He shook Bone's hand and, out on the street, clipped the ear of an eight-year-old demanding a pound to look after his car, make sure no one tried to nick the radio, see it didn't get scratched.

'Listen, you, I find one mark on that motor you're for it. This is Terry Cooke you're talking to, right?'

'Yeah, and my Dad's Frank Bruno.'

Terry shrugged; anything was possible. He walked as far as the corner of Carlton Road and sat in the side bar of an empty pub with a half of bitter and a large Bells. Stress, the doc was right. Terry had it in spades.

There was his daughter, Sarah, for instance. Several months back she had followed her mother's inexact path and taken the overnight National Express north to Edinburgh. No note, no reason, though Sarah's gran, Terry's own mum, that is, had acted strangely about the whole thing and Terry was sure she knew more about it than she was letting on. One of these fine days, when she'd suckled enough gin, it'd all come pouring out. Till then, it was the occasional reversed-charge call from Sarah and a postcard of Greyfriar's Bobby with a scrawled message to say that she and her mum were fine. Terry could imagine the pair of them shackled up in some scabby flat, more likely than not a squat. As long as her mother wasn't into sharing needles, it might not work out so bad.

At least it made it easier with Eileen, Terry's live-in girlfriend. Eileen was a stripper of considerable abilities who, since moving in with Terry, had taken herself upmarket and now specialised in delivering personalised birthday messages dressed in her own version of a WPC's uniform.

Terry tried to tell himself he didn't mind Eileen going out and cuffing some spotty car salesman to a chair while she gave him a tongue lashing, but the truth was that he did. After all, the first time he'd ever laid eyes on her himself, it had been the speed with which she'd got down to her spangled g-string that had taken his eye. Slowly, very slowly. Now whenever Eileen went out on a job, part of him was terrified she'd encounter some muscled hard boy who worked out six days a weeks and made love like a power machine on the seventh. Twenty-three, Eileen, and young enough, just about, to be Terry's daughter herself.

Sarah... then Eileen... and the star over the sodding stable hadn't long faded before Inspector bloody Charlie Resnick had been sniffing round the secondhand shop Terry rented out by Bobbers Mill. Resnick like some scruffy Santa with a ho-ho-ho and turkey gravy on his tie,

offering to do a special New Year inventory of suspect goods. It was only good luck that Terry had been there himself that day, and not his gormless nephew Raymond, otherwise it might not have been so easy to steer Resnick away from the several gross of Sega and Nintendo that had escaped the Christmas market. To say nothing of the camcorders.

Stress? Of course he was suffering from stress. A life like this, how could it be anyway else? But fifty was something he did want to see. It wasn't altogether off the cards that he and Eileen might want to start a family.

Terry lowered himself into the water gradually-none of those bravura dives off the pool edge for him-and began the first of thirty slow, laborious lengths. Not so very long from now he'd be back out and across the road, sitting in the market cafe with a strong tea and a sausage cob.

Resnick got into the station that morning late and less than happy. His own car was in for what might prove to be its last ever service and the Vauxhall he'd borrowed had recently been used for a spot of undercover observation and smelled of hastily bottled urine and too many Benson Kingsize. Halfway along Lower Parliament Street a corporation bus driver had ploughed into the back of a Burger King delivery truck and the consequent brouhaha had blocked the traffic both ways from the Theatre Royal to the Albert Hall and Institute.

'Bit of a lie-in?' Millington asked when Resnick finally pushed his way through the door to the CID room, the smile edging its way, ferret-like, from beneath the sergeant's moustache. 'Deserved.'

'Last night's files on my desk?' Resnick asked, barely breaking stride en route to the partitioned-off section that was his office.

'Likely need a bit of an update by now.'

'Tea, Graham,' Resnick said. 'I don't suppose there's any chance of a cup of tea?' Coffee was his preference, but experience had long since taught him that within the confines of the station the cup that cheers was the safer choice.

'Kev,' Millington called, head inclined towards the far corner of the room.

'Boss?' Telephone in hand, Kevin Naylor peered round from his desk.

'When you've a minute, get kettle on, mash some more tea.'

Naylor sighed, spoke into the receiver, made a mark alongside the list of names and addresses on his desk and got to his feet. He glanced across at Lynn Kellogg as he passed, Lynn sitting impervious at her computer, strolling through the county data base detailing offenders

with a penchant for carrying firearms with malicious intent. That'll be the day, he thought, when anyone dares ask her to make the bloody tea in this team.

Leaning over the shuffle of folders and papers that covered his desk, Resnick scanned through the outline of the previous night's events. Three men had been arrested and held in the cells overnight: two on charges of drunk and disorderly; the third, apparently sober, had driven his fibreglass-bodied invalid tricycle into a Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise and attempted to run over his ex-lover, who was one of the customers.

There had been eleven burglaries reported from the Victorian splendours of the Park estate and seven more, all of them in the same short street, from the less salubrious east side of the Alfreton Road. Carl Vincent was out there now, checking some of these door to door, while Naylor was talking to other aggrieved homeowners on the phone.

All routine: it was the last entry in the night's incident file which claimed most of Resnick's attention. At eleven minutes past three a message had been received giving information of a burglary taking place at a television and electrical goods suppliers in Radford. The officers who had responded, PCs Mark McFarlane and Mary Duffy, had initially reported seeing no obvious signs of forced entry, but in the narrow alley at the rear had run into a gang of four men armed with a sawn-off shotgun, iron bars and a long-handled sledgehammer. A mercy, Resnick thought, that the shotgun had not been brought into play, though he was by no means certain the officers would have agreed. Mark McFarlane was in Queen's with a suspected fractured skull and Mary Duffy was in an intensive care bed in the same hospital, a splintered rib having pierced her lung. Such descriptions as they had been able to give of their assailants were necessarily brief and incomplete-balaclavas and coveralls, boots and gloves-it had been dark in the alley and McFarlane's torch had been smashed early in the struggle.

Resnick snapped open the door from his office. 'Graham...'

'On its way. Kev, what you doing with that tea?'

'This pair in hospital,' Resnick said, 'when did we last get a report?'

'Not above half-hour back. No change.'

Resnick nodded. 'Any list yet of what was taken?'

'I've called the owner twice,' Millington said, handing Resnick his favourite Notts County mug. 'Promised it within the hour.'

'Get on to them again, Graham. Sitting on it this long, likely all they're busying themselves with is massaging the totals for the

insurance. If they keep stalling, maybe you should get down there yourself.'

Millington nodded, right.

'Sir,' Lynn said, swivelling at her desk. 'I've got a print-out of likely candidates for carrying the shotgun. Local, anyhow.'

'Good. Cross-check with the information officer at Central, might be a body or two worth pulling to get things started. Let me know how it's going when I get back.' Resnick took a couple of swallows at his tea and set it down. 'I'm off out to the hospital, take a look at the wounded, see if anything's jogged their memory.' He hoped the traffic had died down and that Duffy and McFarlane would be up to talking to him when he arrived.

He was hoping in vain. McFarlane had lost consciousness again by the time Resnick got to his side and all that Mary Duffy could tell him through bruised lips was that one of their attackers had seemed taller than the rest, two or three inches over six foot, and another might have been stockier and shorter than the other two.

'Voices?' Resnick asked. 'Accents?'

Quietly, Duffy began to cry. 'I'm sorry, sir. I'm sorry.'

Resnick patted her hand and hoped she wouldn't notice when he glanced at his watch.

Terry Cooke collected his tea and roll from the counter and went to his normal seat by the window. Across Gedling Street, the stalls of the open market were attracting a slow scuffle of elderly shoppers, collars turned up against the keenness of the wind. He watched as a lean, slope-shouldered figure, white haired, turned away from where he had been buying what looked like a couple of pounds of potatoes, a few carrots and onions, and crossed towards the cafe.

Like Terry, Ronnie Rather was a creature of routine. Monday, Wednesday, Friday, he would push his olive-green shopping trolley sedately from stall to stall, before treating himself to tea and toast and a small cigar that burned like anthracite and had a similar flinty smell. On alternate Fridays, he splashed out on beans as well.

Since Ronnie had been adhering to this particular routine longer than Terry himself, and had made a habit, when it was vacant, of sitting at the window table, Terry could hardly object when-as today-the old man parked up his trolley against the table edge and joined him.

'Ron.'

Terry.'

There would be no more said until Ronnie had cut his slices of toast into thin strips-soldiers, Terry's mum would have called them, when she had been readying them for the young Terry to dip into his

boiled egg-which Ronnie would then sprinkle with salt before chewing methodically. Two or three pieces despatched into the gurgles and groans of Ronnie's antique digestive system and Terry's breakfast companion would lean forward across the table, resting on one elbow, and engage him in conversation.

Which usually meant, as was the way with those old jossers well above the pensionable age, talking about the dim and distant past when a pint of beer was a pint of beer and the sound of a horse-drawn cart approaching along the road outside was enough to send every self-respecting householder running for his dustpan and broom. Or, in Ronnie Rather's case, when there was a dance hall on every corner, each of them keeping a dozen or more musicians in fulltime employment, and when names like Joe Loss and Jack Hylton were enough to quicken the pulse and set up a tremble at the back of the knees.

Trombone, Ronnie had played; first or second chair with every dance band ever to grace Mayfair and the West End or tour the provinces, where, according to Ronnie, so many women would throng round the stage door it often needed the police to clear them away. If he had really done all the things he claimed, played with all those people in all those places, Terry figured Ronnie Rather had to be the wrong side of eighty if he was a day. Which was just about right.

'Here, Terry...' Ronnie began, and Terry waited for the night the Prince of Wales came into the Savoy and insisted that everyone else was sent packing so that he and Mrs Simpson could dance alone. Or the time at the Queensbury Club just before the end of the war, when Glen Miller recognised him in the audience and insisted that he step up and sit in with the band.

But no, it was 'Terry, you hear about them two poor bloody coppers, got their heads smashed in?'

Terry nodded; he had heard it on the news driving to the pool. A gang of four masked men, heavily armed, disturbed while carrying out a burglary-well, he reckoned he could fit names to at least two of those hidden faces, possibly three, and it wouldn't surprise him if by the time he got out to the shop there hadn't been a call enquiring, in the most roundabout of terms, if he might be interested in enlarging his stock to the tune of a couple of dozen state-of-the-art wide-screen, digital-sound TVs.

'One of 'em a woman, an' all, that's what sticks in my craw. The bloke, copper, I mean, whatever's comin' to him, fair deal. But not the woman-only a kid, too.' Ronnie Rather shook his head in disgust and a piece of undigested toast reappeared at one corner of his mouth. 'Call me old-fashioned, if you like. Don't hold with hitting women, never have.'

'No, no,' Terry said. 'I agree with you there. Ninety-nine per cent.' And he did. 'Listen, Ronnie,' he said, checking what remained of his tea was too cold to drink, 'like to stick around and chat, but you know how it is, got to run. Business. See you soon, yes?'

Ronnie nodded and watched as Terry scooted out through the door and hurried off to where his car was parked on a meter outside the leisure centre doors. Ulcer, Ronnie thought watching him, that's what he's going to get if he doesn't watch out. An ulcer at least.

Millington and his merry team had stuck the proverbial pin in Lynn Kellogg's list of likely candidates and, backed up by a crew of eager uniforms, each and every one of them anxious to avenge their fellow officers, had gone knocking on doors and feeling collars on the Bestwood and Broxtowe estates and in those all-day pubs and twenty-four-hour snooker halls where villains of like minds were wont to congregate. Great sport, but to little longterm avail.

'Anything, Graham?' Resnick asked.

It was late enough in the afternoon for any pretence at daylight to have given up the ghost, and the sergeant's moustache was drooping raggedly towards his upper lip. 'Bugger all!'

It would have taken Petula Clark herself to have walked into the CID room and given out with '*The Other Man's Grass (Is Always Greener)*'-a perennial favourite of Millington's-to bring the smile back to his eyes.

'I thought Ced Petchey...'

'Ced Petchey coughed to a break-in out at the University Science Park which netted a couple of outmoded Toshiba's and three cartons of double-sided three-and-a-half-inch floppy disks.'

'Ah. I thought we'd already charged the Haselmere youth with that one?'

'Precisely.'

It was that time of the day when Resnick's energy was at its lowest and his need for a quick caffeine injection at its most pronounced. 'Look at it this way, Graham. What we've done today, clear out the dead wood. Tomorrow, we'll strike lucky.'

'We bloody better.'

Resnick thought there was no harm in giving luck a helping hand. He left his car on the lower floor below the Victoria Centre and took the lift up to the covered market. Doris Duke was winding sprigs of greenery into a bouquet in which pink and white carnations featured prominently.

'Three of these for your mates out at the hospital this morning, Mr Resnick. By the sound of it, fortunate they wasn't wreaths.'

Resnick slid a ten-pound note along the surface where she

worked. 'If you've a customer for that already, Doris, you could make me up another.'

'Fifteen, Mr Resnick. Got to be worth that, at least.'

'Prices going up, Doris? I didn't see a sign.'

Doris pushed the bouquet away and sat straighter on her stool, hooking the heels of her shoes over the lower rungs. 'Special orders, special price; you know how it goes.' She lifted a pack of ten Embassy from the breast pocket of her pink overall, leaned sideways and slid a lighter from the side pocket of her jeans.

Resnick set five pound coins, each neatly balanced on top of the other, down on the centre of the ten-pound note.

'Word is it's Coughlan. He was the one carrying.' Doris's voice could only just be heard.

'Whoever that was,' Resnick said, 'didn't do the beating.'

'I'm sorry, Mr Resnick,' Doris said, 'this time of the year they're scarce, good blooms. That's the best I can do for now.'

Resnick nodded. 'Look after yourself, Doris.'

'You too.'

Somehow, when he walked away in the direction of the Italian coffee stall, Resnick forgot to take his bouquet.

'Coughlan,' Millington said sceptically. 'Bit of a change of pace for him, isn't it?'

'Self-improvement, Graham. Most likely comes from listening to his probation officer.'

Resnick and Millington were in the left-side bar of the Partridge, what would have been called the Public in more openly divided times. Their fellow drinkers-and it was not crowded-were either single men staring morosely into pints of mixed, or students wearing slimming black and sporting silver rings.

'You think it's true?' Millington asked. He was trying not to stare at a skinny seventeen-year-old, the largest of whose three noserings was decorated with three emerald stones and from whose left eyebrow a tiny crucifix hung from a loop of chain.

'About Coughlan?' Resnick said.

'They get themselves pierced all over? All over their bodies?'

'I don't know, Graham. No idea.' He knew the superintendent's daughter had come back from her first term at university with a gold stud in the side of her ear and a plaited ring through her navel.

'Blokes, too.' Millington shook his head, eyes close to watering at the prospect of a pierced foreskin.

'Coughlan, Graham.'

'It's good information?'

'More often than not.'

'Go wading in, all we're like to do is warn him off. Come up

empty handed.'

Resnick nodded. Coughlan had been involved in maybe a dozen break-ins in the past two years, but each foray to turn over the council house he lived in off Bracknell Crescent had found the neat three-bedroom semi as clean, in Millington's words, as a pair of Julie Andrews's knickers. A shotgun, though; for Coughlan that was a step in a dubious direction. Why go armed to do an empty shop in the wee small hours? Maybe he was trying to get the feel of it, readying himself for bigger things.

'No word who he was working with?'

'Fraidnot.'

'What's that cousin of his called? Barker? Breaker?'

'Breakshaw. Norbert Breakshaw.'

'Didn't he go down for five last time?'

'Carrying a weapon with criminal intent.'

'Maybe the shotgun was his.'

'Then what was Coughlan doing carrying it?'

'Norbert likely give it him to hold, leave his hands free for belting McCrory and the girl. He's a nasty bastard. Certificates to prove it.'

'One thing, Graham, isn't he still inside? Lincoln?'

'I'll check first thing. If he's out and we can put the pair of them together, Breakshaw and Coughlan...'

'Confirmation, Graham, that's what we need. Confirmation.'

'Right,' said Millington. 'Sup up and we'll have another before I get home to the missus. Chicken chasseur tonight, unless I'm much mistaken. Say what you like about Marks, you know, can't fault 'em for reliability.'

Resnick's quip about Karl or Groucho remained frozen on his lips.

Terry Cooke had fallen asleep with the *Mail* open on his lap and orchestral versions of Burt Bacharach's hits lilting out of the stereo. When he opened his eyes with a start, Eileen was framed in the living-room mirror and the violins were just cascading into the theme of '*This Guy's In Love With You*'. There were times, Terry thought, life could be pretty nearly perfect.

'I was just going,' Eileen said. She was wearing a red dress, tight at the hips, high black heels, and her red hair was pinned high above her head. A camel coat was slung over one arm.

'Without saying goodbye?' Terry smiled.

'You looked so peaceful.'

'So?'

Smiling, she crossed the room and he turned to greet her, Eileen bending to plant a red-lipped kiss on the oval of thinning hair where the scalp showed through.

‘What time’ll you be back?’

‘Late.’

‘Why don’t you let me meet you?’

She took a step away. ‘Terry, let’s not start all that again, eh?’

When they had first started living together he had insisted upon picking her up outside whichever hotel or club she had been working, but Eileen had insisted it was bad for business and finally convinced him it was true. No birthday boy for whom she’d just table-danced in a g-string and policewoman’s hat would enjoy the sight of her being whisked away by her live-in lover, likely back home to a bowlful of hot cereal and his and hers mugs of Ovaltine. ‘It won’t do, Terry, it’s bad for the image. You’ve got to see that?’

Terry knew she was right; knew, too, what she wasn’t quite saying-picked up by some bloke old enough to be my father.

Most nights now, unless he had to go out on a bit of business himself, Terry stayed home, television turned low so he’d hear the cab pulling up outside, the clatter of Eileen’s heels up to the door.

‘What is it tonight?’ he asked.

‘A stag night and two twenty-firsts.’

‘OK, see you later. Have fun.’

Eileen hated lying to him, but sometimes he didn’t leave her any choice. If Terry knew she’d gone back to working the pubs-not often, and then only when the landlord had organised a lock-in, which meant bigger tips and less chance of the punters getting out of control-he would not be happy. But that was what Eileen missed, working an audience, feeling all their eyes on you and knowing if you played it right you could keep them there, glued. That feeling of control.

For tonight, she’d been brushing up one of her old routines with a banana and half a dozen ping-pong balls; if that didn’t put at least a couple of hundred quid in the pot, she didn’t know what would.

No chicken chasseur for Resnick to go home to; no wife. A predatory black cat to greet him, hungry, at the front door and three others, more docile, waiting inside. After seeing to them, he fixed himself a sandwich from gorgonzola and smoked ham, forked two pickled cucumbers from a jar and snapped open a bottle of Pilsner Urquell. In the front room, he fished out an old vinyl album, Eddie Condon’s *‘Treasury of Jazz’*, bought a hundred years ago, and set it to play. When Billy Butterfield was taking the introduction to *‘I’ve Got a Crush on You’*, trumpet and piano with the verse to themselves, Resnick recalled seeing Butterfield in person-the ‘seventies it would have been-down the M1 at a club in Leicester, a portly old boy wearing stay-pressed flannels and a blue wool blazer. The number was coming to an end, Ralph Sutton filigreeing under the final chords,

when the telephone rang. Resnick recognised Ronnie Rather's voice right away.

Ronnie was in the downstairs bar of the Old Vic. 'Get your skates on, Charlie, and you'll just catch the last set.'

The band were into something modal, bluesy; sax and rhythm set up on a low stage deep to the rear of the low-ceilinged room. Maybe half the tables were taken, couples mostly, caught up in quiet conversation. Ronnie Rather was sitting midway between the door and the stand, his white hair resting back against the wall, eyes closed, listening.

Resnick went over to the bar, and when the girl had solved seven across she got to her feet and served him a bottle of Worthington White Shield, which she left him to pour for himself, and a large brandy with a touch of lemonade. Dropping his change back into his suit pocket, he stayed there listening: all of the musicians he recognised, was on nodding terms with; he had seen them playing in everything from pubs like this to the pit band at the theatre: they were of an age. 'Second Nature' was what they were calling themselves now; the last time he had seen them it had been something else. The pianist, Resnick thought, had likely been with Billy Butterfield when he had seen him in Leicester.

As the number came to an end, a tenor cadenza over bowed bass, Resnick walked back across the room and placed the brandy down alongside Rather's empty glass.

'Cheers, Charlie.'

'Pleasure.'

Ronnie nodded in the direction of the band. 'Heard Mel Thorpe do his Roland Kirk, have you?'

'Not recently.'

Ronnie tasted his brandy and lemonade and smiled. 'Considering he's not black or blind, he does a pretty fair job.'

On flute now, the soloist sang, hummed and grunted as he blew, spurring himself along with intermittent shouts and hollers which raised the temperature of the playing to the point that one or two of the audience began drumming on their tabletops and the barmaid set aside her crossword puzzle in favour of polishing glasses. The applause was sustained and earned.

'I saw him, you know, Charlie. Roland Kirk. St Pancras Town Hall. Nineteen sixty-four.'

Resnick nodded. He had seen Kirk once himself, but later, not more than a year before the end of his life-Birmingham, he thought it had been, but for once he wasn't sure. The musician had already suffered one stroke and played with one side of his body partially

paralysed; it had been like watching a tornado trapped in a basket, a lion shorn and bereft in a cage.

‘This business with the copper, Charlie. The girl...’

‘Mary Duffy.’

‘If you say so. I don’t like it, treating women like that.’

Resnick allowed himself a smile. ‘One of nature’s gentlemen, that what you’re saying, Ronnie?’

‘Oh, I’ve known a few in my time, Charlie. Young women, I mean.’

‘I’ll bet you have.’

‘And never raised a finger, not to any of them. Not one.’

Resnick nodded again, drank some beer. The band were playing a ballad, medium tempo, ‘*The Talk of the Town*’.

‘Bumped into Terry Cooke,’ Ronnie said, ‘cafe by the market, Victoria Park. Soon as I mentioned it, the break-in and that, he turned all pale and couldn’t wait to be on his way.’

‘You don’t think he was involved?’

‘Terry? Not directly, no. Have a heart attack minute anyone said boo to him in the dark.’

‘What then?’

‘Mates with Coughlan, isn’t he?’

‘And this was Coughlan’s job?’

‘Word is, on the street.’

‘I didn’t know,’ Resnick said, ‘Cooke and Coughlan were close.’

‘Who Cookie was close to,’ Ronnie explained, ‘was Coughlan’s wife.’

‘Second or third?’

‘Third. Marjorie. Cookie was having it away with her the best part of a year. That was before he cottoned on to this young bit of skirt he’s got now. Anyway, while all this was going on, he got himself into a card school with Coughlan. Poker. Dropped a lot of money there on occasion, so I heard. His way of paying for it, I suppose.’

‘Coughlan didn’t know?’

‘Some blokes,’ Ronnie said, leaning a shade closer to Resnick as if letting him into a greater confidence, ‘get off on the idea their bird’s fresh from shagging someone else. Whether Coughlan’s one of those, it’s difficult to tell. But him and Cookie, still speaking. Doing business.’

‘You think Coughlan’s going to be looking to his old pal Terry, then, to help him offload from the other night?’

Ronnie paused to applaud a particularly nice piece of piano. ‘Wouldn’t you, Charlie? What friends are for.’

Resnick bought another large brandy, nothing for himself. ‘Any word Breakshaw might have been involved?’

‘Norbert? Not so’s I’ve heard. But it’d make sense. Evil bastard.

When he kicked inside his old lady's womb, he'd have been wearing steel-capped Doc Martin's.'

The hand Resnick slipped down into Rather's jacket pocket held three twenty-pound notes. 'Look after yourself, Ronnie.'

Ronnie nodded and leaned back, closing his eyes.

When Terry Cooke arrived, waved through the lock-in on Coughlan's say-so, Eileen was down on all fours on the bar, waving an unzipped banana above her head and asking, should she put it in, if there was anyone there man enough to eat it out.

When Coughlan had phoned, the last thing Terry had wanted to do was be seen drinking with him so soon after the break-in and what had followed, but Coughlan had assured him it was a private party. Mates. No prying eyes. He hadn't said anything about Eileen. Maybe he hadn't known. Maybe he had.

Now Coughlan gripped Terry firmly by the upper arm and led him into a corner, some distance from the core of the chanting crowd.

'You'll not be bothered,' Coughlan said, 'not seeing the show. Nothing you won't have seen before.'

Terry looked into Coughlan's face but, heavy and angular, it gave nothing away. In a wedge of mirror to his right, Terry could see the shimmer of Eileen's nearly nude body as she lowered herself into a squatting position, facing out. The banana was nowhere to be seen.

'What's up, Terry? Nothing the matter?'

Terry shook his head and tried to look away.

'Come over all of a muck sweat.'

'Bit of a cold. Flu, could be.'

'Scotch, that's what you need. Double.'

The crowd, grinning, egging one another on, clapped louder and louder as Eileen arched backwards, taking her weight on the palms of her hands, the first brave volunteer being pushed towards her by his mates.

'Not hungry yourself, Terry?' Coughlan enquired, coming back with two glasses of Bells. 'Had yours earlier, I daresay.'

'What's going on?' Terry asked, feeling his own perspiration along his back and between his legs, smelling it through the cigarette smoke and beer. 'What's all this about?'

'Marjorie sends her love,' Coughlan said. 'Told her I'd be seeing you tonight.'

'For fuck's sake, Coughlan!'

'Exactly.' Coughlan's hand was back on his shoulder, like a vice, and Terry, the glass to his lips, almost let it slip from his hand. 'Bygones be bygones, eh, Terry? So much shafting under the bridge. Besides, things change, move on...' There was a loud roar from the

joyful crowd and then cheers. '...Musical beds, you might say. Keeps things fresh. Revives the appetite.' Coughlan looked pointedly towards the mirror, turning Terry so that he was forced to do the same. 'Lovely young girl like that, Terry, shouldn't take much persuading to get her round my place of an evening. Once in a while.' His face twisted into a smile. 'Genuine redhead, natural. I like that.'

Terry held his glass in both hands and downed the Scotch.

'I could have let Norbert loose on you, Terry. He'd have loved that. But no, this way's best. Pals. Pals, yes, Terry?'

Terry said nothing.

'And then there's the stuff from the other night. 'Course I don't expect you to take it all. Dozen sets, say? Sony? VCRs? Stereo? Matt black, neat, you'll like those. I'll have them round your place tomorrow night. One, one-thirty. Norbert, I expect he'd like to make delivery himself.'

Terry Cooke looked at the floor.

'I shouldn't wait around, Terry, to take her home. Someone'll see she gets a lift, you don't have to fret.'

Back on her feet and shimmying along the bar to '*Dancing Queen*', Eileen caught sight of Terry for the first time as he pushed through the door, spotted him and almost lost her step.

There was a light burning on the landing, another in the back room, and Eileen stood for a full minute on the step, key poised, running over her excuses in her head. She'd half expected to get back and find her bags on the pavement, clothes flung all over the privet hedge. Thought, when she got inside, that he might be waiting with a knotted towel in his hand, wet, she'd known men do that; at least his fist. But he was sitting, Terry, in the old round-backed chair that was usually his mother's, cup of tea cold in his hand.

Terry, I...'

'You get on,' Terry said. 'Time you've had your shower and that, I'll be up.' He didn't look her in the face.

Twenty minutes later, when he slid into bed beside her, the backs of her legs were still damp from the shower and he shivered lightly as he pressed against her.

Terry?'

'Yes?'

'Put out the light.'

Resnick and Millington were in the shop when Terry Cooke arrived, not yet ten-thirty and Millington poised to buy a nearly-new book club edition of *Sense and Sensibility* for his wife, while Resnick was thumbing through the shoebox of CDs, looking for something to

equal the set of Charlie Parker Dial sessions he'd bought there once before.

Terry's nephew, Raymond, stood in the middle of the room like a rabbit caught in headlights.

'Ray-o,' Terry said, 'get off and see a film.'

They don't open till gone twelve.'

Then wait.'

'You know why we're here?' Resnick asked once Raymond had gone.

'Maybe.'

'We've heard one or two whispers,' Millington said, making himself comfortable on a Zanussi washing machine. 'Concerning a certain nasty incident the other night.'

'Not down to me,' Terry said hastily.

'Of course not,' Resnick assured him. 'We'd never believe that it was. But others, maybe known to you...'

'You see, we've heard names,' Millington said. 'Confirmation, that's all we need.'

'Though if you give us more...'

'Confirmation and more...'

Terry felt the muscles tightening along his back; he ought never to have missed his morning swim. 'These names...'

'We thought,' Resnick said, 'you might tell us.'

'Remove,' Millington said, 'any suggestion that we put words into your mouth.'

Terry felt the pressure of Coughlan's hand hard on his shoulder, remembered the sick leer on his huge face when he had talked about sharing Eileen. 'Coughlan,' he said. 'Him for certain.'

'And?'

'Breakshaw. Norbert Breakshaw.'

'Thank you, Terry,' Resnick said, letting a Four Seasons anthology fall back into the box; just so many times, he thought, you could enjoy *'Big Girls Don't Cry'*.

'Here,' Millington said. 'How much for this?'

'There's something else,' Terry said, 'something else you'll want to know.'

When Norbert Breakshaw parked the van close to the back entrance to Terry Cooke's business premises, he wasn't alone; Francis Farmer and Francis's brother-in-law, Tommy DiReggio, were with him. Norbert had brought them along, partly for the company, partly to help him shift the gear; they had been with Norbert and Coughlan at the original break-in. Francis had hung back once Norbert had started swinging the sledgehammer and things got a little out of hand,

but Tommy had enjoyed the chance to let fly with an iron bar, get the boot in hard. There's a light on,' Norbert said. 'He's waiting for us.' Not quite right. What was waiting for them was a team of some twenty officers, two of them, Millington included, having drawn arms just in case.

Burdened down by boxes of expensive electricals, Francis and Tommy had no chance to run; Norbert's retreat back to the van was cut off by a phalanx of men and women eager to try out their newly issued long-handled truncheons.

'Just like the military in the Gulf,' Millington explained in the canteen later. 'Not so often you get a chance to give the hardware a try, battle conditions and all.'

Resnick had taken Vincent and Naylor for back-up, but left them downstairs, watching over Coughlan's wife as she offered them a choice of Ceylon or Darjeeling. Resnick read Coughlan his rights as the big man dressed, hesitating for longer than was strictly necessary over the striped tie or the plain blue. Either way, the custody sergeant would never let him take it with him into the cells.

'Some bastard fingered me, I suppose,' Coughlan said, walking ahead of Resnick out of the room.

'Your mistake,' Resnick said, 'doing a job with Breakshaw, letting him wade into those officers the way he did.'

'It wasn't Cookie, was it?' Coughlan stood facing Resnick at the foot of the stairs.

'Terry? No,' Resnick said. 'Besides, I thought the two of you were close. Family, almost. Last thing I should have thought he'd want to drop you in it. Unless you've given him reason, of course.'

'Whatever time is it?' Eileen asked. The faintest glow from the streetlamp, orange, filtered through the curtain of the room.

Terry picked up the clock and brought it closer to his face. 'Half three.'

'What you doing still awake?'

'Can't sleep.'

She turned towards him, careful not to let the cold air into the bed. 'You're not worried, are you?'

'What about?'

'I don't know. I thought maybe the other night...'

'Shush.' Leaning forward, he kissed her lightly on the mouth. 'It's happened. Done.'

'I won't do it again.'

'You said.'

Again he stopped her, this time with his hand. 'Don't. Don't

promise. There isn't any need.'

She moved her mouth so that first one, then two of his fingers were between her lips. Terry reached down and hooked his thumb inside the top of his boxer shorts, easing them lower till he could kick them away to the end of the bed.

'I don't deserve you, you know,' Eileen said, reaching for him, his tongue for that moment where his fingers had been.

'Yes,' he said, when he could speak again. 'Yes, sweetheart, you do.' This had to be a better way, Terry thought, of relieving stress. No matter what the doctor said.

About John Harvey



John Harvey is best known for his richly praised sequence of ten Nottingham-based Charlie Resnick novels, the first of which, *Lonely Hearts*, was recently chosen by *The Times* as one of the '100 Best Crime Novels of the Century'. He is also a poet, dramatist and broadcaster. After living in Nottingham for a good number of years, he has now returned to London to live with his partner and their young daughter.

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